

# Candid images of places

**Meghna Mukerjee**

A sensitive man who has travelled the world, Jyoti Bhatt has many stories to tell. Moments are captured vividly behind his eyes-of-experience, images of places flash past in black and white at their mere mention. The journey of discovery for the renowned painter and photographer has been a fulfilling one. "I was touring Gujarat with a friend to put together material for a seminar on folklore. We wanted to showcase every facet of it and not just the stories and music of the land. Accurate images were

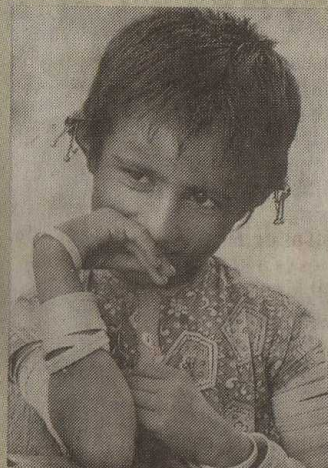
necessary as objects taken out of the surroundings lose their value. So I started taking photographs," says Bhatt, who had no technical or professional knowledge of the camera prior to that. "Being an artist, however, I knew about the basics of composition," he says.

For years Bhatt has unravelled different faces of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and other states. "When you're freezing a slice of life within a fraction of a second, an understanding of the right moment is what makes a good photographer," he feels, adding that it

is also important to anticipate the subject's move and know exactly when to click.

Be it just someone wearing a necklace, or someone laughing recklessly or just glaring into the lens, one finds great fluidity in Bhatt's work. "It's challenging to catch people in their spontaneity," he remarks.

But he feels that every frame is also orchestrated in some way. "We manipulate a frame by selecting a lens, controlling the aperture, shutter speed and sharpness. Also, no matter how natural the image is, subjects become conscious. It's also interesting to



**Colours of India:** Jyoti Bhatt's photographs record the lensman's journey of discovery

click people reacting to the camera," he says.

From vividly captured faces of the Mher girl in Saurashtra, the Mutawa girl in Kutch, to

the carefree gait of the Ahir boys to uncertain glances of the Harijan girls in Kutch, every frame tells a tale. One wonders how much the man

sleeping on the railway ticket counter in Bolpur laboured the whole day, what the person in that unique dhoti jholi in Tamil Nadu is like, how lonely

the old man hugging the puppies is. "This exhibition is a capsule of many of my photographs shot between 1959 and 1994. It took me years to put together what the viewers can experience within minutes," says the photographer.

One notices a particular photograph in which interesting photoshop manipulations have been made. "I wanted to experiment with what the computer can do," says Bhatt, who has used the software like a pen. "All these pictures are taken in natural light. Today we have many options so I've lightened areas that were almost invisible. It's just a way of fine tuning," he adds.

*The exhibition is on view at Gallery Rasa till March 30.*

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